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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 ATHENS 001649

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [GR](#) [TU](#) [MK](#) [AF](#) [ZL](#)

SUBJECT: ASD/ISA VERSHBOW'S PARTICIPATION IN THE HIGH LEVEL
CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING IN GREECE (U)

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CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. The desire for an upgraded and substantive strategic partnership was a recurring theme of the Greek side when Assistant Secretary of Defense (ASD) for International Security Affairs Alexander Vershbow met with Greek Alternate Minister of Defense Panos Beglitis for the 14th U.S.-Greece High Level Consultative Committee (HLCC) meeting November 16 in Athens. ASD Vershbow thanked Greece for its willingness to elevate the level of discussions in the HLCC; voiced commitment to enhancing relations with Greece; detailed the U.S. approach to missile defense; showed disappointment at the change in Greece's ISAF plans, but thanked Greece for other contributions to global stability; asked for Greek support on NATO issues; and encouraged Greece to find solutions to regional disputes. Minister Beglitis expressed interest in building a stronger partnership with the U.S. and acknowledged the role of the HLCC, highlighted Greek contributions and goals in the Balkans, Afghanistan and NATO, expressed interest in learning more about the U.S. approach to missile defense, and indicated that U.S. assistance in resolving regional disputes with Macedonia and Turkey would enhance Athens' ability to be a strong partner. END SUMMARY.

Bilateral Relationship

12. (C) Beglitis stated his objective was to further develop and upgrade bilateral relations through new political approaches on strategic issues. Minister Beglitis affirmed the U.S. and Greece had the same strategic objectives, noting cooperation in Afghanistan and the Balkans. ASD Vershbow expressed U.S. appreciation for the partnership and our support for Greek strategic goals, and noted U.S. interest in leveraging Greek leadership in the Balkans and elsewhere. Beglitis said efforts to upgrade the format of the HLCC demonstrated the political will to

enhance the bilateral approach to strategic issues and enrich the strategic partnership. He agreed that the previous format was less substantive and had limited the opportunity to build a healthy dialogue. ASD Vershbow echoed Beglitis' comments on the restructured HLCC, and expressed appreciation for Greece's support for the U.S. proposal. Beglitis conveyed desire to work substantively with the U.S. on common interests bilaterally and in NATO, but implored the U.S. to find ways to help Greece politically on certain issues so they would be better positioned to move in that direction. Beglitis indicated Greece was committed to resolve an issue tied to the upgrade of the refueling pipeline at the U.S. facility at Souda Bay by the end of the year.

Afghanistan

13. (C) ASD Vershbow underlined that the U.S. remained committed to the mission in Afghanistan and indicated that a final decision on troop levels would be announced in the near future. He expected that, whatever the decision on troop levels, the strategy would call for increased engagement in training, partnering, civilian and economic efforts. Beglitis outlined the new Greek government's decision not to lift a geographical caveat and thus keep its engineering battalion in Kabul rather than move it to Herat to support Italy. He explained that under current economic

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conditions, Greece was not positioned to spend the almost 65 million Euro projected cost to enable the deployment. Ideas to better utilize the Kabul-based engineering battalion were discussed.

14. (C) Beglitis focused instead on increased Greek contributions to economic assistance for Afghanistan. ASD Vershbow expressed disappointment with the decision not to deploy its ISAF engineering battalion out of Kabul, but was appreciative for Greek pledges to deploy an OMLT, contribute 3 million Euros to the ANA Trust Fund, provide two medical teams to RC-North, maintain commitment to take over Kabul Airport security in 2010, and provide funds towards the Hungarian PRT and the UK-France Helicopter initiative. ASD urged Greece to stay engaged, and to look for additional opportunities to contribute, noting that Greece's large military should enable a larger military contribution to ISAF. He underscored that failure in Afghanistan and an emboldened Taliban would have global repercussions, and noted that general publics needed to have a stronger understanding of the mission.

15. (C) Beglitis opined that Western strategies toward Afghanistan and Pakistan were not comprehensive, and advocated a role for India, as a regional actor, in the discussions. Beglitis raised the issue of corruption in Afghan politics and inquired about views on alternatives to Afghan President Karzai. ASD Vershbow agreed that the recent Afghan elections had been flawed and that we needed to raise the issue of corruption at the highest levels of government. Beglitis commented on the challenge of imposing Western standards on a tribal form of society.

Balkans

16. (C) Beglitis indicated that the situation in the Balkans was worsening. He noted as a result, Greece's strategic objective to bring all Balkan states into Euro-Atlantic institutions by 2014 -- including Macedonia, if the name issue was resolved appropriately. He also said Greece did not have issues accepting Kosovo into Euro-Atlantic institutions. ASD welcomed this comment, noting the U.S. recently reversed its position on Serbian membership in the Southeastern Defense Ministerial forum. ASD Vershbow commended Greece's strong support of the Balkans. ASD Vershbow reaffirmed the U.S.'s open door policy, saying that resolving unfinished business in the Western Balkans was important for regional stability.

17. (C) Beglitis relayed that Greek Prime Minister Papandreou met his Macedonian counterpart recently in an effort to establish goodwill. Beglitis urged the U.S. to help Greece politically by pressing Macedonia on the name dispute, and conveyed Greek commitment to resolving it. He noted the policy of the previous Administration to recognize Macedonia by its constitutional name was not helpful to bilateral relations and had created a negative impression among the Greek public. ASD Vershbow said the U.S. and Greece could agree to disagree on the past, and should focus on the future. He and Ambassador Daniel Speckhard did voice concern about mixed signals from Athens, given hard positions relayed to the UN mediator and softer messages delivered to the U.S. Vershbow warned Greece against backing Macedonia into a position where it

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could not compromise. (The ASD was later assured by the Prime Minister's Diplomatic Advisor that this was a bargaining tactic tied to maintaining support among the Greek public for the ongoing negotiations.) ASD Vershbow encouraged Greece to continue bilateral negotiations with Skopje but agreed to raise the issue with the Macedonian Minister of Defense during that week's Adriatic Charter Ministerial. He relayed that in previous meetings with Minister of Defense Konjanovski, he had been blunt in urging Macedonia to make a decision on the name so it could continue progress toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

18. (C) Greece also indicated desire to take a command role in the eastern sector of NATO's KFOR - a mission with more relevance for the Greek public. Beglitis raised Bosnia, saying recent developments had taken a negative turn. He noted a Croatian official recently suggested the dissolution of Bosnia and partitioning of territory to Croatia and Serbia as a solution to current political problems. Beglitis said that Serbia was not the sole problem, and the issue must be looked at from a broader perspective. Vershbow expressed concern at the Croatian comment, saying talk of partition of what was already a loose confederation was a dangerous concept that could lead to a return to violence.

Missile Defense

19. (C) ASD Vershbow told his interlocutors the United States hoped for Greek support over the coming year so that at the 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit Allied leaders could embrace missile defense as a NATO mission, and as a key aspect to the Article V collective defense guarantee. He explained that the Phased Adaptive Approach was more effective, responsive, and better able to evolve than earlier U.S. missile defense plans. He stressed that the decision was not based on Russian concerns, but changes in our assessment of the threat and new breakthroughs in technology. He laid out the

four phases of implementation, explaining that Phase 1 will be sea based on U.S. Navy Aegis ships in the Eastern Mediterranean, and Phase 2 would include the first land-based site for the SM-3 missiles (aka, Aegis Ashore). For geographical and technical reasons, this land-based site would need to be located somewhere in southeastern Europe: Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, or Greece. He stressed the U.S. was not making a proposal to Greece, but offered to try and facilitate expert-level follow-on consultations if Greece was interested in a potential role. Beglitis expressed interest in gaining more clarity on the technical aspects of the U.S. plan and the related costs, but did not express any firm interest in participating. Vershbow noted the U.S. had discussed missile defense plans with several Allies, who generally held positive views of the new plans, but that no decisions had been taken. Beglitis relayed his belief that Ankara is skeptical about participation because of negative perceptions in Iran and Russia.

Turkey

¶10. (C) Beglitis explained that Turkish overflights of inhabited
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Greek islands had increased by fifty percent, and were impeding closer Greece-Turkey ties. He pointed out Greece has been a long-time supporter of Turkish EU membership aspirations as a means to creating a more peaceful environment, and that the new PM had made a point to travel to Istanbul, where he met with PM Erdogan, during his first days in office. Vershbow remarked that Greek statistics on overflights were taken seriously. Vershbow stated the U.S. recognized Greece and Turkey must resolve Aegean issues bilaterally, and highlighted Turkish Chief of General Staff General Ilker Basbug's previous offer to develop an Aegean code of conduct. Vershbow raised the idea of establishing "rules of the road" for the whole of NATO airspace as a way to defuse the issue of Turkish and Greek overflights and intercepts in the Aegean. Beglitis was open to considering a NATO role in helping to reduce tensions, but suggested that any effort to establish "rules of the road" should be on the precondition that it has a general NATO character and not be limited only to the Aegean. Essentially, such a "code of conduct" should be something that could be couched in general NATO principles for any NATO airspace. He emphasized that the situation in the Aegean was of serious concern and had a psychological impact on the Greek public. He said a constructive U.S. approach to the issue would build the credibility of Washington. On the other hand, like the Macedonia name issue, a soft U.S. approach toward Turkey on the issue would have a detrimental impact on the U.S. image in Greece. ASD Vershbow affirmed that key international law should be respected and suggested disputes should be dealt with by international institutions. He indicated he had encouraged General Basbug to continue the recent moratorium on overflights, and assured him that other senior officials were engaged on the issue. Beglitis expressed concern that pro-Islamic sentiments of the government in Ankara are harmful to U.S. strategic interests, noting Turkey's deteriorating relationship with Israel.

NATO Issues

¶11. (C) ASD Vershbow commented that the Strategic Concept document should be concise, easy to understand, and resonate with the general public that has grown skeptical of the Alliance in the

post-Cold War world. He stated it must achieve a balance between new versus conventional threats, and between Article V versus expeditionary operations. ASD Vershbow outlined U.S. goals for NATO Reform: more efficient allocation of resources, more common funding, greater development of "niche" capabilities whereby smaller countries like Greece could bring specific capabilities to missions, collective procurement such as the C-17 airlift consortium, and streamline NATO civilian and command structures. Beglitis supported the use of the Strategic Concept to redefine the Alliance's raison d'etre, and called for inclusion of climate change, energy security, and immigration in the threat assessment. He cautioned against measures to limit consensus-based decision-making even below the level of the North Atlantic Council and the Military Committee. Beglitis noted Greece would lead a rotation of the NATO Response Force (NRF) in 2012 at a projected cost of \$150 million. ASD agreed to explore Greek requests for U.S. personnel for the NRF rotation and also for the NATO Maritime Interdiction Operations Training Center at Souda Bay. The ASD noted Greece's recent non paper on NATO-EU cooperation provided a solid starting point for discussion, and inquired about Turkey's reaction to it. Beglitis expressed pessimism on prospects for NATO-EU cooperation, but disputed that it was due to bilateral Greece-Turkey issues.

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112. (U) This cable has been cleared by ASD Vershbow.
Speckhard